No. 103

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Such a glorious day," she said softly. "How dear dad used to enjoy this view."

R. of M. G., No. 103.

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GERALD HALCOMBE looked at Morris Hope, all the enmity and hate had left his heart now. He meant to fulfill Dora's last wish; to defend the man, her husband. He was persuading Morris to leave everything in his hands.

"Thank goodness there is no one in the house but Jane," he continued. "I have sent the other servants away. Say you will be sensible, and allow me to manage things for you; it would be better for us all if you did. Even if you do let the world into our secret, what can it do but arouse a wretched scandal? Come, do as Dora wished, let everything be kept dark."

"As you will. What can it matter, one way or the other?" said the other, miserably "But I must look once more on the face whose light I have put out for ever. May I come with you and see her?"

Gerald loked perplexed, then brightened up, and said:

"I will tell Jane. Wait and get something to eat and drink—you look half-dead—then come over. I shall expect you in half an hour."

"I will come, but I cannot eat or drink."

Just then the deaf and dumb woman entered with some refreshments on a tray.

She motioned Morris to the table, but he shook his head, then she took some biscuits and a glass of brandy and water and pressed him to drink and eat.

Gerald looked on, surprised at the strange deaf and dumb woman's earnestness and emotion; he noticed, too, that she watched their lips when they spoke, and seemed to understand.

He left the two standing by the empty grate, hurried to his own home, and said to Jane directly he saw her:

"Put everything in order. Hope is coming to look

his last in this world on the face of the woman he has wronged so cruelly."

"I wonder the sight will not blind him," said Jane savagely; "I hope it may."

"Hush, Jane! Remember that curses, like chickens, come home to roost. Can you be ready to travel the day after the funeral?"

"Must we go so soon, sir? Will it be safe?"

"Far more safe than remaining here. We must start at the earlies possible moment, a day's delay would be dangerous. I expect my sister; she will be here in four days at the latest."

"I understand, sir; but won't she think it strange that you should go away when you expect her?"

"I suppose she will; but I must write to her and explain something about an interesting case, important to me as a physician. Poor girl, she will be lonely shut up here."

Morris Hope then entered the room.

"Mr Hope," the young doctor continued, "I share this sin equally with you, for I stirred my poor darling up to rebellion, and therefore excited you, and directly caused the deed that brought such misery upon us.

"You wer mad with jealous rage, and committed an act that I am sure you will repent all your life. Therefore, you suffer punishment enough. The pity is that you did not shoot me—I deserved it more than that poor poor child.

"Now, by law, I am punishable for aiding and abetting you after the act; but it is her wish that I should screen you. She was so sorry for you when she saw your remorse. Besides, you were her father's friend, and therefore the gentle soul feared her father would not welcome her to that other life if she left you to suffer punishment at other than God's hands.

"You seem ill, worn-out, and unfit to act in this emergency; therefore, if you are wise, you will leave it all to me.

"The funeral must take place at once, for I am bound to leave England in the course of a few days.

"Fix the time now, and you shall have no further trouble about it. I will carry out the poor girl's wishes in the matter—it is my privilege to do so."

Morris bowed his head on his hands, while Gerald's rapid speech went on. Now he raised it and said, in a hollow voice:

"I will leave it all to you. Do as you think best; nothing can matter to me now."

"Suppose we say the day after to-morrow, then. I have written to the late Mr. Clyde's friends. They are few and far away, so no one will come Now, good-night. Go and get some rest, or you will have a serious illness."

Morris rose and tottered out into the darkness, and Gerald, as he closed the door after him, said regretfully:

"Poor fellow! His punishment seems already more than he can bear."

In a snowstorm the young girl was laid in her grave, while the soft flakes fell on the bowed heads of the two men who had loved her.

Then the strangely assorted mourners parted, each to go his own way, and strive to forget the other, Gerald going southward and Morris to the shelter of his desolate home, to shut himself up in solitude, and nurse his remorse till it grew of giant strength and mastered him, and threatened to overthrow his reason.

Chapter 338

FROM OUT OF THE PAST.

SELWYN HOWARD, standing before the beautiful woman whose mournful looks and sombre dress told of recent sorrow, said to her, "I am travelling to England, Miss Halcombe," you must let me be your escort. You are worn out and unhinged, and not fit to encounter the perplexities that beset a woman travelling alone. Say, can you trust your father's old friend, and let him see you safely home to old England?"

Rosalind looked grateful, and said in her sadly softened voice:

"You are very kind and good, Mr. Howard. I had hoped my brother Gerald would have come for me, but his letter tells of a very serious case, where life depends upon his skill, so, of course, that detains him. Besides, he knows I am accustomed to travel, and, indeed, I could manage all right alone; yet it would be more pleasant to have someone to look after me, for I do feel rather used up and out of heart."

"Well, that is settled, then; we travel together. My mother and her companion will accompany us; but they know of your bereavement, and will not tax your patience by intruding upon you when you wish to be alone."

So Rosalind found herself traveling back to England with a truly pleasant party. Mrs. Howard was a fragile little old lady, whose one aim in life seemed to be in glorifying her only son.

So engrossed was she by her past that she paid no

heed to the present, and shut her eyes upon all signs of love in another. And clever Selwyn Howard forgot his own assurance of a hidden depth in her life, and longed only for the woman, not for the satisfaction of proving his professional sagacity.

Amongst themselves the Howards had named Rosalind "La Reine," because of her gracious dignity, her indomitable reserve and self-containment, and Selwyn loved her better for the pride that kept her at a distance from all but reserved friendliness.

When they arrived in England Rosalind said farewell to the ladies, but not to Selwyn; he declared he could not rest content unless he saw her safe and sound in her brother's keeping. He had been so kind already that she felt it would be churlish to refuse to accept this further proof of friendship.

She was a little heartsore, too; a new disappointment she felt at finding her brother had not met her as she had desired him to do. She was too fond of him to feel much resentment at his neglect, yet just now, in face of Selwyn's unfailing care for her, it seemed a sad slight to come from an only brother; but she schooled herself, saying brightly:

"Ah, our meeting will gain pleasure by these delays!"

And Selwyn made himself as amusing as possible, to keep her mind from dwelling on her disappointment.

She arrived at the old home one fine frosty forenoon, and found the place brightened up for her reception. Sparkling firelight gleamed through the windows, the garden was newly swept, the hole place, indeed, had been garnished for its young mistress.

A trim maid-servant opened the door, but Gerald as not there to greet his sister. Looking like a slighted queen, she said sharply, to the pleasant-faced maid:

"Where is my brother? Does he not expect me?"

Rosalind's proud lips quivered, and her face went white as the servant answered:

"Dr. Halcombe is abroad, ma'am, but he left instructions for your reception, also a letter. It is in the library."

Rosalind's head drooped as she led the way to the library. She took the letter up, dismissed the girl, motioned Selwyn to a seat, and tore open the envelope with shaking hands.

Selwyn Howard pitied her from his heart as he saw her struggle to retain composure as she read the brief epistle.

She folded it carefully when she had done so, and restored it to its envelope, saying, with a smile that was more like pain than pleasure:

"I knew he would not neglect me if he could help it. He is obliged to remain away for an indefinite time, I fear. It is foolish to feel so hurt, but I can't help it. I never have given way like this, but I know you must understand how upset, how disappointed I feel. Gerald is all I have now my father is gone."

Then she sank into a chair, and, throwing her arms on the table before her, hid her face upon them and sobbed aloud.

Selwyn bent over her tenderly, saying as he lifted her head and laid it to his madly-beating heart:

"Hush, my darling! Why grieve like this? Why need you be lonely? Come to me, my own. Be my wife, for I love you as never yet a man loved a woman."

Rosalind started to her feet, her face suffused with vivid blushes, as she said entreatingly, holding his hand in her firm clasp:

"Hush! This hurts me more than all. I am not free to accept your love, for I am already a wife, for-

saken, unloved, yet still a wife."

Selwyn Howard staggered; this confirmation of his suspicions was terrible to him. For a moment or two he was silent, battling with the fiercest emotion he had ever felt.

Still her cool, firm hands held his, and seemed to impart to him some of her courage. With a mighty effort of will he conquered his emotion, and stood steady as a mountain that a storm had passed over, then, with a sigh, he said:

"You a wife, Rosalind, and not mine! Ah! Now I know what disappointment means! Forgive me if I have pained you afresh; you have quite enough to bear without new misery of my making. I need not tell you how deeply I feel this; your strong, brave nature can look beneath the surface to the hidden depths below.

"If speech could lessen pain, I would outcry the winds, but silence is the surest balm to a proud heart.

"Well, I may still retain your friendship, so I am not quite bankrupt; for your friendship is dearer to me than the love of any other woman. Tell me your story, dear; I deserve your confidence."

"Indeed you do; but there is little to tell, though much to suffer."

"Yes; but you have shown that we can suffer and be strong. You still love the scoundrel who has ruined your life?"

"God help me, I do! But don't blame him altogether. I brought much upon myself. Come, we can still be friends, loyal and true."

They sat down by the fireside, and Rosalind told Selwyn her story, truly and with no half confidence—told it him gently, with only now and again a little bitter break in her voice.

Selwyn heard it out in silence, only pressing the

hand that lay in his to show his sympathy.

When she had ended he raised the hand to his lips and kissed it softly, saying as he looked into the lovely brooding face that kept its stormy dark eyes fixed on the pleasant blaze:

"And this man's name, Rosalind? You have not told me that."

"Morris Hope."

"Morris Hope!" he repeated. "Ah! I shall remember!"

So they parted, and when Selwyn had gone, Rosalind sought her own room, and saw no one till another dreary day dawned. She arose refreshed and invigorated by sleep, so much so that she almost enjoyed her solitary meal, thanks to a glimpse of sunshine and an amusing magazine. So bright and breezy was the day that Rosalind determined to go for a stroll. Cozily attired in rich furs, she called a favorite dog to accompany her, and startled off at a brick rate to walk to Wembley.

The frisky gambols of old Bob amused her; the bright breeze, the sunlight, all helped to exhilarate her drooped spirits; everything seemed more hopeful to her in the clear light of day. On she went, and soon found herself in the hilly highway.

She had not been there for years, and looked on the old familiar scene with a sensation of pleasure such as we feel at sight of a face that has never failed to smile on us.

She hastened into the quaint churchyard to refresh her memory of the wonderful view from the hill.

"Such a glorious day," she sail softly. "How dear dad used to enjoy this view, which for all his travels he thought the most charming in the world."

The breeze freshened, and feeling slightly chilled, Rosalind bought some new books and the materials for

some fancy-work, and then turned her steps homeward.

Just as she got clear of the shops, she saw a tall, gaunt figure approaching that seemed strangely familiar to her.

It was that of a woman, dressed somewhat after the fashion of a sister of mercy, her face covered by a long black veil, and her figure shrouded in a dark cloak.

As she advanced, Bob barked joyously, and frisked about and tumbled his great, stupid, good-natured head against the woman's skirts. She stood still, and seemed troubled, surprised and uncertain about something, and stil Bob continued his boisterous greeting.

Rosalind called him off, scolded him and apologized for her favorite's freedom. The woman bowed stiffly, and would have passed on, when the wind rose and blew the veil from her face. Rosalind sprang forward impulsively, grasping her arm as she said, sharply:

"Amy Hope, I have found you at last, the missing witness who can prove my marriage."

The woman, startled by Rosalind's recognition, drew her hands out of her muff and began talking quickly with her fingers, while her troubled eyes seemed to plead for pity.

"Ah, I remember," spelt Rosalind; "for a moment, in the surprise of seeing you, I forgot your affliction. Where is your brother now? I do not want to trouble him—our interest in each other ended long ago; but tell me of him and of yourself. Do not think I blame you for any of our mistakes. I know you did all in kindness, blinded by your affection for Morris."

Amy's face darkened sullenly as she spelt:

"He has been a good brother to me, and I of all the world should be the last to fail him. Do not detain me; he is very ill, he may die before I return to him. I have

come all this way for a doctor. Dr. Halcombe, who lived so close, has gone abroad Goodbye."

"No, no, Amy, we'll not part yet; still I need not hinder you. Our roads lie in one direction. I will go with you to the doctor's, and wait till we can return together. Tell me of Morris—what ails him? Has he been long ill?"

The woman remained sullenly quiet, her hands thrust into her muff, and passed on. Rosalind followed, and quickly overtaking her, patiently waited until she should be more affable, which was not until she had seen the doctor, explained her brother's state, and gained his promise to attend at once.

Rosalind, who had entered with her, eagerly read the paper Amy put down before the doctor, which explained that Morris Hope lay ill unto death of brain fever: that he was full of insane fancies, and so delirious that she had great difficulty in keeping him in bed.

"Hurry back," wrote the doctor, "it is not safe to leave a man in his condition alone. I will follow with all speed, and give you further directions when I have seen the patient."

Then he turned to Rosalind.

"Do you know how long he has been ill?" he asked.

She informed him that she had but a few minutes before met Miss Hope, and knew nothing whatever of their trouble, but intended to find out all she could while returning with Amy.

Then she followed the dumb woman out into the chill air. The sky had clouded, the wind dropped, and heavy clouds threatened a snowstorm as the two, both with anxious looks and troubled hearts, turned together homeward.

On the road Rosalind learnt that Morris Hope had fallen ill suddenly a few days before. She found, too, that Amy and he lived alone in old Mr. Clyde's house, and

that she and they were therefore very near neighbors.

"Ah," she thought, as she went on through the blinding sleet which now began to fall; "how strangely things come about. There must be more than chance in this meeting; surely some all-seeing power has directed that our lines of life should cross again, but to what purpose? Who can tell? All I know is that my husband is sick and solitary, and may die. My duty is clearly to help and comfort him. At such a time grievances die out, and duty directs the true woman. I will go to him, by force if necessary, and see him through this trouble. Then we can say good-bye again; parting must get easy by repetition."

Amy's gloomy eyes scanned Rosalind's face, and she wondered what thoughts gave that face such glow and grandeur. She was willing to hold out the olive-branch, for she knew that Rosalind was to be trusted to give generous help and loving sympathy; she felt sure that this trial would find her at her best.

Besides, she must have assistance, and where could she look for a woman with such courage and self-control as Morris's wife?

She had the right to seek her husband's side, though Amy wondered that she was willing to do so after his cruel desertion of her; but she loved her brother, and believed anyone who loved him could forgive him anything.

Amy read all things by the light of the heart. True, the thought of the lovely girl her brother had recently brought to the house for the night, and whose mysterious disappearance had long perplexed her, rather troubled her now, but, she argued, Rosalind could not know of this dark page in her husband's life, unless she had heard of it from him, which was not likely.

She shut her eyes to all doubts of her brother, and

believed that whatever he had done had been forced upon him by adverse fortune. He was the only person who had cared for her since her desolute childhood, and even though he did not often own their relationship, he had always shared his fortune with her. He had never left her alone and uncared for, to fight for life in her silent world where his smile had made the only brightness.

On through the street went the two women, whose love had outlasted wrong and neglect; went with only intense pity and loving compassion; went together in renewed friendship, both bent on one purpose.

Chapter 339

"MORRIS HOPE IS MY HUSBAND."

EEKS passed and still the sick man hovered between life and death. Rosalind spent most of her time by his side, tending him with all the devotion of a loving wife. She grew wan and weary with ceaseless watching, and unutterably miserable by reason of his ravings; sometimes they were of her, of happiness, love and all that makes youth pleasant; then he babbled of a woman, a wife even, who would not be won to love him.

He would whisper horribly of jealousy, despair, and death, then shout out that he did not intend to kill her, that he was mad, mad. He talked of Gerald, too, of fraud and fear of punishment.

Rosalind's heart sank. Why had she left his life to drift on alone unguarded, tossed about by every fresh excitement, every new temptation? Who was the "Dora" he called upon so often in tones that set her heart on fire with jealous envy?

Ah, well! He needed her now, time enough when he recovered to question him; still, she could not help trying to gain some knowledge from Amy, a useless quest that only brought a baffled pain to her, for the dumb woman was loyal to her brother, guarding all that concerned him with the jealousy secrecy of one who had but one love, one idea, one desire, and that to see him safe and happy.

Letters came from Gerald to his sister, always promising to return; but Rosalind's life was now so full of work that she ceased to wish for his home-coming.

Somehow she felt sure they would clash about the man she loved with new intensity since he had become dependent on her.

Gradually bodily strength returned to Morris, but his mind still remained clouded, and the doctor grew very grave, and suggested further advice, which Rosalind gladly accepted; so Science sent her most illustrious men to pierce the darkness of a mind that even in its decay made grand shipwreck of a power many had felt and marveled at.

The change came gradually; he ceased to rave, and grew docile and contented. He would sit silently by the fire for hours, looking into the glow with wistful, wondering eyes. The mind seemed groping for some forgotten link that should recall its full power and vigor, and while this lasted the body gained strength; only the fine face, with its fathomless eyes, spoke of something wanting to complete the man.

Rosalind's care of him at this crisis surpassed even the accepted notions of wifely devotion.

The grave-faced doctors spoke to each other of her courage, her complete surrender of self, and wondered why she knew so little of the husband she loved so passionately.

Gentle as a child, Morris at this period seemed to live but on her looks, to be guided but by her words.

Daily she gave more and more time to him. What mattered it to her that her servants marvelled, and that friends who visited her found her own home vacant?

She had no thought but for that darkened life she loved, no wish but to see his manhood return to him.

She had no hope of future recompense, no thought of the happiness that might still be hers if he would reward her devotion by renewed love. It was enough for her to feel he depended upon her for every care and com-

fort.

And so in strange unquestioning faith she gave up her life to him, and waited for she knew not what.

One day she was awakened from her quiet acceptance of fate by a visit from Selwyn Howard. He had been to her home, and there entertained by a gossiping maid with a full account of her mistress's strange absence, and being told where to seek her, had come with hot resentment in his heart that she should have so little care for her reputation.

Rosalind received him in the little library where Dora had first entertained her guardian.

The place spoke eloquently of a woman's presence now; it was once more bright and homelike.

Selwyn Howard, startled by the change from fresh bright health to pallid looks and anxious manners, questioned her as to the cause.

She semed vexed that he had sought her, but was too perfect a lady to seem aught but grateful for his anxiety.

"What are you doing here, Rosalind? What would your brother say if he knew how you brave public opinion by spending all your time tending a man who has no claim on you?"

Rosalind smiled wearily, and crossing to his side, placed her hands in his as she said:

"Selwyn, please do not scold. I cannot bear it. Besides, you do not know."

"I do not know what?"

"That I but do my duty by being here. The master of this house is Morris Hope, my husband."

"Good heavens, Rosalind, you amaze me! But how comes it that he is master here? This place belonged, I believe, to a Mr. Clyde, a banker, who amassed a considerable fortune, and left it to an only child, a girl."

"I know nothing about that," said Rosalind, wearily; "I only know he is my husband, alone and helpless, and that he is the present possessor of this place."

She took her hands from his, and sat down by the fire, warming her chilled fingers, for it was a bitterly cold day, and she felt all the shivering fatigue of a disturbed night; she had sat up late with Morris.

Something in her attitude and looks appealed to Selwyn; he loved her too well to vex her further, yet he determined to take the matter up. He went away presently, and Rosalind felt that somehow after this she would not be allowed to work out her future in her own way.

That day the doctor told her the manner of her husband foretold a coming change, though of what nature he could not yet determine; but he begged her to watch him ceaselessly, to try to divert his mind into some pleasant channels, to sing to him, and endeavor to recall his memory by means of music. She ought to remove him to a brighter room, and treat him as though he were in his right mind—to do all and everything, in fact, to try to awaken the dormant senses to their old vigor.

When the doctor had gone, Rosalind called Amy and told her what he had said, so they brightened up the little library, got out a lot of music belonging to poor Dora, and prepared to take Morris's mind by a storm of pleasant sights and sounds.

Rosalind attired herself in the fashion he used to most approve, and with a cozy dinner laid for three in faultless taste, and the dreariness of the winter day shut out by the crimson curtains, stirred up the fire, lit all the lights, opened the piano, and when all was at its best and brightest led down the vacant-looking man, who made straight for the fire, warmed his thin hands, and seemed pleased and interested in his surroundings.

Rosalind sighed; it was sad indeed to see one so lost to his own individuality; yet she strove to amuse him, and so far succeeded that when she asked him if he would like some music he gave an assent.

With the touch of one to whom music was a kindred spirit, Rosalind played all the grand soul-stirring themes she remembered. At first he did not seem to notice, but presently rose and crossed to her side and appeared disturbed by some vague, undefined sympathy.

He had been a passionate lover of music, and had composed some stirring marches and charming songs in his hours of ease and leisure. Some of these Rosalind had treasured and knew by heart; she thought they might now awaken the soul that created them.

From one piece to another she played on, and he stood still beside her; then she suddenly remembered the piece he had taken most pride in, a difficult composition which she had never played quite to his satisfaction; its exquisite modulations required very skillful handling, and it was at once intensely expressive and sublimely grand—indeed, a great conception never brought to the perfect completion that could satisfy the composer.

Morris listened intently, and Rosalind, noticing his awakened interest, grew slightly nervous, faltered, and struck a false note. Crash came his hand down on the keyboard, and quite in his old tone he said angrily:

"Wrong, wrong, quite wrong. I wish you would pay more attention."

Rosalind shook from head to foot as she rose and said:

"Show me how it goes; I have forgotten it."

He sat down and played it perfectly, his face softening and brightening as each chord fled from his master touch into the world of never-dying sounds that our ears cannot follow. On, on he played, drinking in the

music as though it were healing water, and his eyes grew clear again and lost their baffled look, his lips softened, and he seemed more himself, more a man, more a master.

Rosalind's heart beat painfully. How would it end? She knew that Amy waited in an adjoining room, yet she feared the awakening.

She was not long left in suspense, for soon he threw an arm about her, and said fondly:

"You like my music, darling? It pleases you?"

"Indeed it does," she answered, drawing his head upon her breast, and kissing his broad forehead tenderly. "Play on, does it not ease the pain in your head?"

"I have no pain, Rosalind; what makes you think I have? I am quite well."

He pushed her away a little impatiently, and went on playing, getting more engrossed at each chord. Presently he got up, placed her in his seat, and said:

"Sing something, sweetheart, while I get a cigar."

"Let me get you one, Morris dear; you have not any in that coat, I know."

Then she hurriedly left the room, returning with a cigar-case, and lit a vesta for him in the old coquettish manner he used to admire in her. He smiled and kissed her fondly.

"Why, you are getting stingy," he said; "where's the wine?"

She told him he was not well enough to drink wine. And he laughed and declared he had never felt better in his life.

To avoid further discussion, Rosalind sat down to sing. Dora's songs were strange to her, so she sang one from memory—one that he used to like because it suited her voice so well, and was, besides so pathetically beau-

tiful. It was "John Anderson, my Jo." Morris stood by the chimney-place smoking and absently looking into the mirror as she sang.

Her voice faltered at first, but gained power and she lost herself in the full meaning of the song; and, coming to the second verse, she sang more clearly, carried away by the words. Morris had been vacantly looking at his own reflection. Suddenly he started, and peered at himself with a pained look, and a great light came into his eyes that showed the soul had received a shock—the shock of reason too suddenly restored.

With a bitter cry he sank into a seat.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "I remember all now."

Rosalind sprang to his side, and knelt down gasping him in her strong, protecting arms, as she said, tenderly:

"Calm yourself for my sake, husband. Look at me and say you are not sorry to find yourself in my care. I am your wife, you know, dear—your own loyal, loving faithful wife."

"Go away; do not touch me, lest the whiteness of your soul be blackened by the contact! I am the most miserable of men. There are none in all the world that, knowing my sin, would clasp hands with me. Ask me not for my story—I cannot tell it to you and see your eyes look loathing where they once looked love. Go! If you are compassionate, go! I cannot bear to see you here now that I know the wretch I am."

Weak and worn with sickness Morris bowed his head, and wept as men weep only in the hour of their direst agony.

All the past came back clearly, all the sin and shame; but still this beautiful woman knelt at his feet, imploring him to confide in her, to love her, for was she not his wife?

And did she not love him beyond all things, even honor? Would he not trust her and let her care for him? Would he not be happy with her, and forget all the miserable wretched mistaken past? She drew his hands away from his face, and pressed them to her bosom, as she kissed his wan cheeks and haggard eyes.

Oh, the wonderful witchery of her passionate abandon, that threw pride aside to sue for that which as her right, her husband's trust and love! He would have been less than mortal in this hour of awakened agony to have been proof against her entreaty, her beautiful appeal to him.

He could do nothing but caress the lovely woman before him, and straining her to his despairing heart cry out that she was his very own, his wife! His love! His treasure! All that was left to him of purity and peace!

Rosalind yielded to his passionate endearments with a subtle sense of joy; he was won afresh, they could still find time in life for happiness, might even forget the folly of their first union in the true faith and perfection of their second.

All at once he swept aside her hopes by a few ruthless words.

"Rosalind, I am more unworthy than you can imagine, and you must let things go on in the old fashion. I am not free to accept your sacrifice, for between us lies the sin of my love for another."

"Ah!" said Rosalind, white to the lips, all the gladness dying out of her looks as she rose to her feet, erect, and almost menacing in her proud air of slighted dignity.

"I understand; a woman stands between us; but if she is more to you than a friend the dishonor is hers, not mine, for in spite of your desertion, your weariness of me, I am by law your wife.

"Our marriage, desecrated, despoiled of all its beauty as it has been, cannot be called by a less noble name. I am not ashamed of my weakness, my love, my yielding, for the laws of God and man have made my love sacred—I am your wife."

"Who gave you authority to say that, Rosalind?"

"One so well versed in law that none would dispute the point with him—Selwyn Howard."

"Darling, I have done cruel wrong to more than you, yet I am glad my sin has left no stain on you; yet, perhaps, if you knew all, you would pray God to free you from me."

"Why not tell me all, Morris; oh, why not trust me? Did I ever break my faith? Cannot you see that nothing you could do could change my love for you?"

"Listen," said Morris, drawing her close to him. "Not if I told you that I had married another woman?"

His burning eyes were bent upon her white scared face, but she answered without faltering:

"No; not unless you love her best."

"Would it kill your love to tell you that in this very house I murdered her?"

"My God, Morris; you are mad!"

"Ah, I knew you would not hear that and still cling to me!"

"Oh, it cannot be true!" exclaimed Rosalind, piteously.

"It is true! May Heaven pity me! I must always be weighed down by this sense of blood-guiltiness. Go, Roslind; leave me; I am not worth a wife's pity; much less her love. Go, dear, and try to forget there ever was such a wretch as he you call husband."

Rosalind stood motionless, her face pale as death, trying to think out the meaning of what she regarded as Morris's ravings.

"Why do you stand there reproaching me with your wild eyes and white looks?" he said. "Have I not done wrong enough that you should tempt me to sin against you further by trying to keep you with me?"

Rosalind's voice now found utterance.

"Morris, tell me all," she said, pleadingly. "You know I would sooner die than betray you. Surely you will not be so cruel as to tell only half, and leave my wretched imagination to fill the space your silence spreads between us. Unburden your heart to me. Remember only that I love and pity you."

She drew his head upon her breast, and won him to tell her all the wretched story. At mention of Gerald's connection with the matter she shuddered, but she heard him out in silence. When he had finished she was still silent awhile; but presently, drawing him closer to her, she said:

"It is awful to hear, Morris, but you were mad, and not alone to blame. Who am I to judge you harshly? Murder has been in my own heart when jealousy has maddened me.

"You are sick and in sorrow; God judge between us if I add to your punishment by trying to make your life easier to bear. Oh, sweetheart, how you must have suffered! I cannot think it wrong to try to comfort you!"

She pressed her lips to his forehead with passionate fervor, smoothing the thick hair fondly. After all, she felt she was but a weak, love-guided woman, eager to regain her husband at any cost now that he had quickened her heart by his urgent need of her.

Something told her he would die if she did not hold him back from despair.

Then a sudden thought struck her, and she said:

"I understand now how this place became yours

and the money too, dear; but since the marriage was not legal, it follows that they cannot be retained. I am glad of that, for I have enough for both of us. We will give up all this unholy gain, and commence afresh."

Morris lifted his head.

"Rosalind," he said, "you are an angel; through you I may gain pardon from Heaven. If the whole devotion of my worthless life can repay you for your love, it shall be yours. Do as you will with me, darling. Had my past been guided by your pure wishes, all this sin and shame would have been avoided, and we should have been happy. Your pure spirit shall plead for me."

A feeling of rest and peace fell upon him, and for a while the silence that succeeded was unbroken.

Presently Morris roused himself from his reverie, and said anxiously:

"But we must not forget Amy—eh, wife?"

"Of course not, Morris, for she has been so faithful to you. You will be glad to get away from here—glad to begin life afresh, free from all associations that can recall your miserable madness. When and where shall we go?"

"Anywhere, my queen; all places are alike to me if they be shared with you; but I am afraid I shall be a burden to you—I shall never be bright and companionable again."

"Morris you will always be the one love of my life. But hark! There is someone at the door; I will send Amy to you and see who it is."

Rosalind went in search of Amy and told her to stay close to her brother while she went to answer the door.

Rosalind hurried to the door, and when she opened it the sleet blew in and blinded her for a moment; then a strong hand grasped her and drew her out into the dark-

ness. A sudden feeling of fright took possession of her. She struggled to get away from that grip, but it seemed useless.

Chapter 340

"I AM HIS WIFE ALREADY."

THE DOOR blew to with a slam, and shut Rosalind out in the bleakness of the winter night; above her loomed the tall form of a man, who said in the well-remembered tone of her dear brother Gerald, "Rosalind, what are you doing in that man's house? Come home at once. You must be mad to risk your reputation for the callous dog."

He had dragged her out to the gate, regardless of the wind and sleet that beat upon her uncovered head.

"Gerald, release me. I am no child to be driven about by your caprices. After all the weeks of neglect and carelessness on your part it ill becomes you to bully me because I find pleasure without you. Set me free, Gerald. I will follow you. I am not such a fool as to make a scene for the amusement of my own servants.

He released her, and she walked on with her regal head held proudly erect She entered the house, followed by her brother, who looked sad and anxious.

When alone in the cozy sitting-room he faced her fiercely, asking how she dared dishonor their name by so shamelessly disregarding the common decencies of life as to act as nurse to a man who was no more to her than the merest stranger.

"Gerald Halcombe," Rosalind retorted, "do you forget you are speaking to a woman of your own race—one who brooks no man's scorn, because she knows she does not deserve it! If you had been in a more gentle mood I might have given you my confidence. As it is, think what you will—I care not."

"I don't think you care for anyone's opinion, or you would not act as you do; but understand that from this night all association with Hope must cease. Our father left you to my guardianship, and I will see that you do not disgrace yourself or our name further.

"I have always believed in you, and thought you a woman whom pride lifted above temptation of this kind; but most men are deceived in their womankind—I among the rest. Go to your room. I don't want to discuss the matter further."

"Go to my room, indeed, like a refractory child sent to bed! No, sir. Let me remind you that all these rooms are mine. My father left a home for me that should be sacred to me. I don't think your presence here in your present temper will conduce to my happiness, so suppose I suggest that you seek other quarters till you can treat your hostess with the respect due to her, and which she insists upon receiving under her own roof."

"Rosalind, you will regret this."

"It won't be my only regret. I am no child, remember, to be cowed by a brother's harshness. If you would consult me about anything, you must set about it civilly and not traduce my friends."

"Rosalind, there must be no friendship between you and Hope. He is a villain, and I will not allow a sister who is under my guardianship to endure his vile presence.

"I cannot tell you all, but I beg you for our dead father's sake to be advised by me. Do, dear; don't let your temper blind you; you know I have your welfare at heart.

"We are alone in the world; do not let this stranger come between us. You used to love your brother. For the sake of the time when we were happy children together be guided by me; come, you can be

sensible when you like—be sensible now."

"Gerald, I do not want to be bad friends with you. God knows I am lonely enough to value what few ties are left to me, but above every other tie in life I value that which binds me to Morris Hope."

"Rosalind, of what do you speak? You cannot mean that you have been mad enough to join yourself to him?"

"But I have, and all the brothers in Christendom could not alter the fact."

Gerald sank into a seat, desperate at this new trouble. He saw it was useless to argue with his sister in her present mood. Just then a servant entered, and said someone wished to see Miss Halcombe.

Rosalind left the room. In the hall she found Amy wrapped in a dark shawl. She came forward eagerly, spelling on her fingers a message from her brother, who bade his wife return at once to him.

Rosalind explained that Gerald had returned, and promised she would see Morris early on the morrow. Returning to her brother, she found him busily writing, and to her surprise saw that the letter was directed to Selwyn Howard.

Then she remembered that he had been a friend of her father's, and had been consulted about some business connected with his will.

She passed a restless night, and, rising haggard and unfreshed in the chill grey dawn of the winter day, slipped out to see how her patient progressed. Amy gave a good account of him, and then Rosalind explained that owing to her brother wanting her on business, she could not see Morris for a few days, but would write to him.

Gerald was surprised, when he came down, to see his sister, for rising late had always been one of her

failings. He guessed the reason of her having been out so soon, but thought it prudent to refrain from speaking to her on the subject, seeing that her eyes grew stormy when he hinted it had been a cold morning for a walk.

After breakfast to avoid discussion Rosalind sat down to the piano and played piece after piece in brilliant fashion, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling.

Gerald sat by the fire moodily reading the paper.

"Sing something to me, Rosalind, I have not heard you sing for an age."

"That has been no fault of mine," said she, as she sorted out her songs. "I could not very well make my voice heard over the sea, or perhaps I should have startled you in your mysterious pursuit of science."

Then with a defiant ring in her clear rich tones she sang "Logie of Buchan."

As the last chord died away, a visitor was announced, and Rosalind rose to greet Selwyn Howard, the defiant light still in her eyes.

"Howard and I want to talk business, Rosalind," said her brother, "so perhaps you will excuse us if we withdraw and leave you to your music."

"Certainly I will, but Mr. Howard must promise to stay for luncheon."

"I shall be glad to do so, Miss Halcombe."

They went into another room, and Rosalind decided in her own mind that she was the subject of their discussion.

So, to show her indifference, she returned to her music with renewed interest.

Meantime Gerald was saying, as he brought his hand down heavily upon the table—

"I would rather see her dead than married to that fellow. She shall not marry him if I can help it. Why could she not have taken you?"

"Ah, why? Yet you see she won't under the circumstances. But I fancy I can find a way to manage it, with your help."

Then he bent forward and whispered something that sounded like "bigamy."

Yet he was careful not to divulge the secret that Rosalind had entrusted to him. His idea was that, if once she knew Morris had taken another in her place, even though that place had been left vacant by death, pride would prevent her ever filling it again.

Then, if he could persuade her to sue for a divorce, the road would be clear for him to marry her himself. He coud not, because of respecting Rosalind's confidence, show Gerald his plans, but still he could promise to arrange matters to the young doctor's satisfaction.

Luncheon passed off pleasantly enough, and Gerald informed his sister that Selwyn Howard, his mother, and Mrs. Langley were coming to spend a few days with them. Of course, Rosalind was obliged to profess herself charmed, and she at once set about providing for the entertainment of her guests.

So busy was she that she found little leisure for speech with her brother, who spent much of his time from home.

Sometimes she managed to slip away and spend an hour with Morris, who was rapidly recovering and eager to be away with her from the scene of his wretchedness.

Yet he could not press her to come to him while Gerald was there; he was too much in the young doctor's power to risk coming to an open rupture with him.

Rosalind and her brother dined alone, as usual, the day before their expected guests were to arrive, and then, with an apology for leaving his sister, and a promise of speedy return, Gerald went out into the night, and

followed the road to Wembley, where, on the outskirts of the town, he entered a cottage, and was eagerly welcomed by a wan little woman with great pathetic eyes and a tangle of golden curls.

Left alone meanwhile, Rosalind wrapped herself in a warm shawl, and went to see Morris, who was restless with longing for her.

"How glad I shall be when we can go to the sunny south, Rosalind, and make our home under unclouded skies. Are you sure you do not regret the sacrifice you will have to make in leaving all to follow the fortunes of one of the most worthless men in the world?"

"You only ask that to hear me protest the pleasure it will be for me to be with you Keep up heart and grow strong again, darling, for my sake."

When Rosalind returned home she found her brother awaiting her impatiently.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, hotly

"Suppose, Yankee-like, I answer that question by another: Where have you been?"

Gerald flushed from chin to brow, and answered, angrily:

"That does not concern you, but your visit to that scoundrel Hope does concern me"

"Don't let us quarrel, Gerald."

"Heavens knows I have no wish to quarrel with you, Rosalind, but this must end. Hope cannot marry you."

"Why not? His wife is dead."

"How do you know that?"

"Upon good authority—his own."

"Ah! Perhaps he told you, too, how she died?"

"He did."

"Rosalind, are you mad?"

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